

# Frequently Asked Questions About Early Voting

The following is a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) about early voting in Wisconsin. This list is created from questions asked of the Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) at our Listening Sessions and from other questions received about early voting. G.A.B staff will periodically update this list. If your question is not answered in this document, please contact staff at [GAB@wi.gov](mailto:GAB@wi.gov).

## **1. Why is the G.A.B. holding these listening sessions about early voting? What is the objective of the early voting listening tour?**

In response to issues raised about the early voting process during the 2008 Presidential Election, the Government Accountability Board began to study the feasibility of implementing early voting in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. directed staff to seek public comments and solicit feedback from voters, election officials, legislators, community partners, and other interested parties.

The listening tour was created to achieve this objective.

With the listening tour, it is our hope to inspire a meaningful dialogue and discussion about the opportunity to implement early voting in Wisconsin, and also improve Wisconsin election administration.

## **2. What are the current procedures for voting before Election Day in Wisconsin?**

Voters may vote an absentee ballot, without an excuse, in-person at the office of their municipal clerk or by mail. Voters must complete an absentee application and return their voted ballot in a sealed, certified and witnessed envelope.

All absentee ballots are tracked in an absentee ballot log maintained by the municipal clerk, and then transported to the polling place or central absentee count location for tabulation on Election Day.

## **3. What is “true early voting” and how is it different from the current procedures for voting early in Wisconsin?**

True early voting is when a voter either completes or casts an optical scan or paper ballot by placing it in a voting machine or other secured container before Election Day. True early voting is also when a voter casts a ballot using an electronic voting machine before Election Day.

True early voting is different from current procedures for voting early in Wisconsin because it allows the voter to actually cast their ballot before Election Day, instead of voting by absentee ballot.

**4. With true early voting are votes tabulated before Election Day?**

No. All true early votes cast are tabulated on Election Day

**5. If Wisconsin were to adopt early voting would it replace all forms of voting absentee?**

No. If Wisconsin were to adopt early voting, it would only replace the current procedure for voting in-person absentee at the municipal clerk's office before Election Day. It would not replace mail-in or other forms of voting absentee before Election Day.

**6. What is the proposed time frame for implementing an early voting pilot program? What is the proposed time frame for implementing early voting?**

It is our hope to have a pilot program before implementing early voting statewide. A pilot program is proposed to start for the April 2010 Spring Election. The proposed time frame for implementing early voting statewide would be September 2010.

**7. How would early voting affect Special Registration Deputies (SRDs)?**

There would be no changes to SRDs if early voting is adopted in Wisconsin.

**8. What are ballot styles? Why is the number of ballot styles a concern in adopting early voting?**

Every different combination of races for an election is a different ballot style. For example, if there are 25 county supervisory districts up for election, a county will have at least 25 different ballot styles. Additional ballot styles may be created if municipal districts cross the county districts, or school districts cross the county districts, or municipal districts cross school districts.

Ballot styles are a concern when adopting early voting because voting machines may have to handle ballots for an entire large city or county. These machines must handle far more ballot styles than machines at normal polling places. Some voting machines currently in use can handle only a few ballot styles.

**9. What percentage of voters would be interested in early voting?**

Though it is difficult to get an exact number, G.A.B. staff estimates that in November 2008, nearly 16% of Wisconsin electors voted early through in-person absentee voting. In other states that offer early voting, the percentage of electors voting early has been as high as 40%.

**10. What is a Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting system, and why are they suggested for early voting?**

A DRE system is a touch-screen voting machine. DREs can handle as many ballot styles as necessary for early voting, and they are accessible to persons with disabilities. In Wisconsin, DREs have a voter-verified paper audit trail (VVPAT) that permits a voter to review their choices before a vote is cast on the DRE. The VVPAT is the official record in a recount or election contest.

**11. How far away is cell phone or Internet voting?**

Due to technical, logistical and security issues with current technologies, the G.A.B. does not have any current plans for cell phone or Internet voting. There are some states that allow registration over the Internet, but none that employ Internet voting.

**12. What will happen with early voting once the Listening Sessions have occurred?**

The next step after the listening tour presentations is to compile clerk and public feedback into a report. G.A.B. staff will then present this report to the Government Accountability Board for their approval. Ultimately, this report will assist the G.A.B. in drafting recommendations to the legislature regarding early voting.

**13. How was the estimate of \$7,020 in staffing costs for each early voting site during the pilot program calculated?**

The figure of \$7,020 in staffing costs for each location came from assuming three poll workers being paid \$12/hour for 13 hours a day for 15 days. This cost could be lowered by clerks using their staff to work early voting sites, paying poll workers less than \$12/hour, or by having the site open for fewer than 13 hours a day. We see \$7,020 as a ceiling of how much an early voting site would cost, and believe that many sites will be able to be run for less than that amount.

**14. Who will pay for the expenditures to adopt early voting? And, how?**

To adopt early voting, the G.A.B would be responsible for costs in modifying the Statewide Voter Registration System. Other costs, depending on what early voting options are selected, would be assumed by the municipality and/or county.